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We hadn't expected our old friend to lay such a solid foundation when he spoke of the "virtue of imitation." He began with economics, then moved on to music, and then explained the role imitation plays in the development of the human mind. For some reason, he even included Ghazali in the mix.

“In fact, the imitation of developed-country products by developing countries can be seen as a stepping stone in their economic development. Once upon a time, when we referred to Japanese goods as "slipshod goods," we meant that those products were "poor quality imitations." Later, this also applied to Chinese goods. But these slanted-eyed individuals went so far in this imitation that they even imitated major cultural centers like Venice within their own countries.

“Starting from the 1960s, songs sung by foreign singers in the field of pop music began to be imitated, or in other words, adapted, into our own language under the name of ‘arrangement’.

“On the other hand, students will remember that there's a psychology course on "learning by imitation." And while we're at it, let's recall a thought by the 11th-century Islamic theologian Ghazali, "rising from the level of imitation to the level of doubt."

“Undoubtedly, imitations that glorified the original eventually began to transform into original products. The Chinese made countless inventions, and the Japanese became known for the quality of their products. Our people sang original songs that rivaled foreign pop music.

It crossed my mind that this ‘allusion’ he was highlighting was a national self-criticism.

“I confess that in my early youth, I was a fan of Western music. I can say that I was more familiar with the names and songs of foreign artists. Later, while I also listened to local pop music, I found it to be of lesser quality. Ours was a pop music industry based entirely on imitation.

Finally, enough of this rambling, he moved on to the main topic. I don't know if the fact that the hero takes him back to his adolescence brought back any nostalgic memories, but I can say that I was worried that the weight of such criticism would fall on us.

“When that blonde girl appeared on TV screens as one of the newly famous pop singers of our youth, I don't think I ever gave her a high place in the country rankings.

“It is said that she had a traumatic and unhappy childhood after her parents divorced after when she was the fourth daughter in the family. Her own marital status, which included multiple failed marriages, could explain the distinctive melancholy in her songs. Her on-stage screams could be interpreted as reflecting her fragile personality.

Although she did not write the lyrics of her songs, they were lyrics that reflected her life story. Perhaps it was an adjective, deemed appropriate. Her songs were a cry to remind us of who we are. She expressed herself through them. Her words, in the fatalistic discourse of arabesque, bore the deepest traces of resignation and acceptance. On the other hand, it was undeniable that he had a combative past. Despite his mother's protective restraints, his unyielding, self-willed nature seemed at odds with the fatalistic cries of his songs.

“Behind this woman's art, one can always sense feelings of incompleteness, fragility, and a struggle with pain. It's as if she's imperfect, genuine with her flaws and

wounds. And perhaps that's why there's a searing reality in her cries that cuts deep within us.

“Her art was dominated by unspoken pain, great struggles, and a deep sense of loneliness.

I don't know to what extent these spiritual descriptions will literaryize the portrait, but I couldn't help but appreciate the efforts to analyze her personality, as if they were trying to extract oil from a fly.

“She was not a versatile person like some artists who did not confine themselves to one field and tried out others. The performer aspect of her artistic personality was dominant. However, once, thinking that life begins after forty, under the influence of irresistible urges within her that were eating her up, she wrote her memoirs. However, this seemingly affectation-like attempt to confront the past was likely premature, given the accumulated experience over time.

“The life line that shows occasional instability can be tolerated to some extent. Although her childish, never-maturing stubbornness demonstrated a vital dynamism, there was no compensation for the years that had passed. Life was slipping away from us. Finally, when she married someone 25 years her junior, with the longing or fixed idea of a happy marriage, it took her six months, with the help of her guardian angel, to escape the tragic delusion of this dream, which she clung to as if it were real.

“After a woman who joined a live TV program claimed that the artist's husband was a fraudster and had taken a large amount of money from her, other women who also participated in TV programs claimed that this man, whom they said was their ex-lover, had defrauded them on various occasions.

“This was the beginning. Images of the man with the leader of a religious community that was trending nationwide at the time also emerged.

Our old friend paused for a moment, likely contemplating how to proceed. Naturally, we could not have predicted that he would take us back a thousand years in time to understand today.

“As a statesman who brought solutions to the social turmoil of the era, the Seljuk vizier Nizam al-Mulk was aware of the importance of religion. By placing religious education under the auspices of the state, he made a crucial move in establishing social order. Thus, religion would play a unifying, rather than divisive, role in society. While some thinkers argue that Ghazali, who served at one of the schools named after the vizier, had a detrimental effect on the development of religious thought through his works, I believe the real reason for the stagnation was that these schools were established under state control "in the name of teaching correct religious knowledge." The role of religion ceased to be personal and officially assumed a social character, and thus its primary function became one of maintaining social order. Naturally, traditional religion would never have anything to offer as a remedy for a pop singer's affliction.

“Sufi orders that emerged outside the official understanding taught in schools gained vitality to the extent that they aligned with traditional religious knowledge. Furthermore, these orders, which prioritized individual maturity as their religious goal, found adherents even in the most remote corners of the country.

“As is the case everywhere and always, religion was a field to be exploited by power, and for several centuries it was used by both the government and its opponents as a cover for social injustices.

“While the words ‘religion and state’ appear together in collective prayers across the country, it is quite impressive to see the confession of helplessness that the reason for prayer is realized in the personal wishes, prayers and intentions sincerely written by visitors in the prayer and wish books in the tombs located in villages and rural areas.

“In its protective role, the state was always vigilant against civil religious movements. It issued serious warnings, especially in the early second quarter of the 19th and 20th centuries, to be on the lookout. However, over time, religious orders had strayed from their original identity and suffered their share of the general decay of institutions. It could be said that, burdened by their absence, these places had become ghostly entities, "with a name but no substance." Only those who sought to wield "power" under the guise of religious orders remained.

We have forgotten what these explanations summarizing the historical course of the relationship between religion and state could be a preface to. While I was thinking about this during our old friend's short break, that sinister community leader suddenly came to mind.

“Although many media outlets reported that the community leader was not criminally responsible due to his mental health, the court sentenced him to thousands of years in prison.

“This man rose to fame, especially among conservatives, early in his career for his opposition to evolution and Zionism. As is well known, the debate is less about the scientific validity of evolutionary theory and more about a philosophical and theological battle centered on the existential meaning of humanity and how religious sacred texts should be interpreted.

“The community leader's publications and financial clout played an indisputable role in helping anti-evolutionism transcend scientific circles, reach a wider audience, and enter schools and publications. He and his followers were the most influential actors in popularizing anti-evolutionism, blending it with religious arguments, and making it visible in the mass media.

The topic suddenly turned to Jewish history. But we knew full well that it was inevitable that the old man would use this as the basis for his narrative, connecting it to the community.

“The Ottoman Empire was a refuge and a homeland where they would experience a "Golden Age," especially for the Sephardic Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492 and accepted by Sultan Bayezid II.

“Sephardim, who settled in the empire's major trading centers, particularly Thessaloniki and Istanbul, brought with them to the Ottoman lands their knowledge of many crafts and industries, including printing, weaving, gunpowder production, and cannon casting. Jewish physicians, diplomats, and economic advisors also played active roles in trade, medicine, and diplomacy, and held high positions in the palace. Jews, like other non-Muslim communities, enjoyed religious, legal, and financial autonomy within the Millet System, led by their own chief rabbi. Sephardim had long preserved Ladino, a dialect of Spanish that incorporated Turkish, Hebrew, and Greek words. With the establishment of the Republic, the status of the Jewish community was redefined.

“Jews had retained their religious freedoms under the minority rights enshrined in the Treaty of Lausanne. However, community leaders decided to waive their minority rights in personal law, thus expressing their preference for equal rights as Turkish citizens. With the

compulsory Turkish language in education and public life during the Republican era, the use of Ladino declined, and Turkish became more prominent. The wealth tax enacted during World War II specifically targeted non-Muslims and severely damaged the community economically. Following the establishment of the State of Israel, particularly in the 1950s, a large Jewish population left Türkiye and immigrated to Israel. Today, the Turkish Jewish community is a small minority, the majority of whom live in Istanbul, pursuing their cultural and religious life. The community has its own schools, synagogues, and foundations.

“In short, Jews, especially Sephardic Jews, played a significant role in both social and economic life of the Ottoman Empire from its founding and enjoyed a tolerant existence for a long time. During the Republican era, they were legally considered a minority, but due to political and economic turmoil, they emigrated in large numbers.

“Zionism, on the other hand, as a modern movement, aimed to establish and maintain a national state for the Jewish people in their historic homeland of Palestine. Anti-Zionism, on the other hand, is opposition to this goal and the means of achieving and maintaining it.

“It can be argued that, across a broad segment of society, anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism are intertwined, sometimes even indistinguishable. In many regions, people have struggled to distinguish between the policies of the State of Israel and the identity of the entire Jewish people. When Zionism is criticized through state policies, this criticism can easily veer into hatred and anti-Semitism directed at all Jews. The community's role is crucial, as it highlights a unique and complex dimension of how the issue is perceived in our country.

After such a long and explanatory introduction, I can say that I had a hard time understanding how the community dismissed its opposition to Zionism with a few insipid words like, “My daughter, I am telling you, my daughter-in-law, you understand.

“Let's talk about the Mahdi! The savior figure is a universal archetype. In times of crisis, uncertainty, or decay, societies create such a figure as a symbol of collective hope and rebirth. It recurs repeatedly in diverse cultures and religions throughout human history. Belief in the Messiah, one of the most powerful savior figures in Western culture, is based on the expectation that justice will be established in the world with the resurrection of Jesus. In Judaism, the Messianic expectation is the belief that a king descended from David will establish God's kingdom. Many movements throughout history have been shaped by this expectation. In Buddhism, Maitreya is the Buddha figure who will emerge in the future and restore the world to righteousness. In Hinduism, there is another savior, a future incarnation of Vishnu, who will destroy evil and restore cosmic order. In Zoroastrianism, the savior is a figure who will emerge in the end times and purify the world by defeating evil.

“In the Far East, people relied on inner enlightenment and the moral perfection of the past to solve problems, so they felt no need for an external hero to save them. However, Chinese culture and folk beliefs have addressed this need in other ways over time, such as through Buddhist beliefs or the viewing of leaders of local rebel movements as Christ-like figures. The discrimination and oppression that the Roma people faced was so intense that, instead of "fighting the system," they preferred to bypass it, that is, to avoid being caught in it by constantly moving.

“In modern culture, political leaders, revolutionaries, and even pop culture heroes are secular versions of this ancient savior figure.

The old man's final words inevitably brought to mind the line, "Save us, father!" in reference to a prominent figure in our political history. It is reported that at a rally, the people cried out to the leader, "Save us, father!" A prominent journalist criticized this as the people expecting salvation from another "father" figure against the prohibitions they had voted into law. Furthermore, as I recall, the same line was also the subject of a song.

The community leader's Mahdi rhetoric, however, hasn't found a central response within the country's religious ecosystem. Traditional communities generally harbor the Mahdi claim as a latent expectation within themselves, but don't openly voice it. The leader's public display of this belief was met with criticism in Orthodox circles. His rhetoric spread primarily through television programs, flashy presentations, and popular culture. Although he was accused of numerous crimes in the indictment, I don't know if his primary offense was appearing as an inappropriate color in the painting. The charges against him and his group included establishing and leading a criminal organization, sexual abuse and forced imprisonment, blackmail and threats, fraud, and money laundering. These accusations are seen as concrete acts that directly threaten individual safety and social order. Perhaps the leader's true "crime" was not only his actions but also his Mahdi-like beliefs, which loomed large in the picture. Because society wants to see the religious and cultural spheres in a certain harmony. His Mahdiism was like a bright but discordant paint applied to a corner of a painting; it was eye-catching but disrupted

the picture's integrity. He didn't fit into the traditional order. He built his own scene with lights, screens, and a tabloidized religious discourse. He briefly captured the public's attention, but simultaneously eroded trust.

“In the past, he had also gained prominence with his criticisms of women who wore revealing clothing. However, over time, he veered off course, once saying of women who posed revealingly, "They'll burn in hell, they're all living in false happiness, hell awaits them." Later, he shifted to saying, Women should freely wear revealing clothing, wear makeup, ignore those who seek to sap their vitality, and live freely. His dance shows on television made it impossible to predict where he would stand. His anti-Zionism had devolved into close contact with the Jewish state, allowing him to defend the Jewish right to Palestine.

“This community has faced both academic and legal criticism for distorting traditional Islamic teachings, which fall outside the orthodox understanding of Islam. Court rulings and assessments by religious authorities have clearly stated that this movement is incompatible with mainstream Islam. The High Criminal Court described this organization as "oriented towards a religious understanding far beyond the norm" and as "a structure intent on distorting Islam."

“This movement, in contrast to the ritual, moral, and knowledge-based structure of Orthodox Islam, developed a form of religious presentation based on visuality, popularity, and individual charisma. In this respect, it bore similarities to both postmodern religious movements and media-driven cult movements. The narrative clash unfolded between the "silence-laden stone madrasah" of Orthodox Islam and the "slogans echoing in the movement's illuminated studio."

From the flow of his theological discourse, it appeared we were nearing the end. I couldn't tell whether he was trying to tidy up what appeared to be a rather scattered topic or to completely dismantle it, leaving it inextricably tangled.

“Here, we can also speak of the "messiah" in terms of the savior figure. A graduate of the Faculty of Theology, a former mufti, and a one-time member of parliament who entered the political arena, he completely changed his political and religious roles after his post-political career, claiming to be a messiah. This individual attracted attention for bringing up controversial issues related to recent history in Parliament, insulting the Great Leader in his conferences, and delivering anti-secular speeches, for which he was expelled from his party. He was later sentenced to a one-year prison sentence for insulting the founding leader. Upon returning home from a foreign country where he had lived for nearly three years, he was sent to serve his sentence in prison for approximately three months before being released, following the completion of his sentence in accordance with the provisions of the Penal Execution Law. It was observed that he entered a period of introversion and isolation, beginning with his imprisonment. In an interview, the former mufti stated that he was revealed to be Jesus Christ by God while in prison and announced that he would fulfill his duty with his disciples.

“There was a widespread belief that his transformation was the result of torture inflicted upon him while in prison. However, he denied all allegations of torture. He also wrote two books. He continued his activities with his congregation, which he claimed to be his disciples, for a long time through his own website and

social media accounts. He celebrated his birthday every year on Christmas Eve.

None of us could have imagined that he would start from the Mahdi and then turn to the messiah and then the messenger. In fact, I couldn't help but think that these heroes were individuals who had risen to prominence in society and, for better or worse, had their names written into the history of religions.

“Another example of a Messenger who held positions such as inspector, manager, and expert in various official institutions was another figure who enriched the history of religious culture, and it is fitting that we mention him as well. We can note that this individual, who continued his work through television, radio, and the press, spent the last twenty years abroad. Upon his death, his remains were brought to the country, and his burial ceremony was held with thousands of attendees. Interestingly, DIB officials, who stated that those who call themselves prophets are "committing a grave sin," explained that they "did not send" a religious official to his funeral for this reason. However, a few years later, an event occurred in the relationship between state institutions that gave hope for the existence of democracy in the country. The Constitutional Court has issued a decision that does not find it appropriate to prevent the foundation founded by the so-called ‘false prophet’ from opening a branch in the country.

Then?! .. Our old friend unexpectedly returned to his first hero, that is, the Mahdi candidate story.

“I followed the trial proceedings closely. A statement in the prosecutor's indictment regarding the "armed organization," accused of more than thirty crimes, was not included in the court's decision. However, the organization was classified as a "threat" within the state's

security paradigm. I wondered if this situation was politically motivated. It's clear that the allegation might not necessarily be included in the decision text, and this might be entirely natural. However, if not, the first thing that comes to mind is that the missing statement might signal a rift or a high-level agreement between prosecutors, judges, or political figures. As I pondered the possibilities, a detail between the lines in the DIB's report on religious communities came to mind. This detail had seeped directly into official records, suggesting a major issue being covered up. What could such a "between-the-lines" statement possibly mean? It implies the existence of a much more sensitive issue concerning ideology, politics, or public security, beyond the actual illegal activities for which the leader of the movement is being prosecuted, such as financial, organized crime, and so on. Why was it omitted? If this statement is not included in the verdict, it suggests the court isolated this issue from the case due to its "political implications" or "public repercussions." However, the outcome remains unchanged despite thousands of years of conviction.

I have long known that our old friend, who gave us a broad tour of theology based on a not-so-prominent pop singer from his youth, was disturbed by his ‘philosophical’ attitude towards the relationship between the individual and the state, and how the bureaucracy’s flexibility in bending the law was justified in the name of ‘society’s survival’.After this mental exercise, he moved on to a conversation that, aided by his nostalgic memories, gave me some clues about how some of his ideas had been formed.

“The "arbitrariness" of "I wanted it, it happened"—a phrase added to an admiral's criteria for determining a criminal, highlighting the bureaucratic mindset of "I am

the law"—reminds me of a memory from many years ago. While performing my military service, I was subjected to an investigation by my superiors "on one occasion." When I was asked to defend myself, as a formality and almost as a defensive reflex, I explained that one of the duties of even the smallest military unit without orders was "to ensure its own security" I noticed a smile appearing on those seemingly serious faces, barely concealed. However, the sentence had already been handed down before the investigation.

Finally, our retired friend spoke of a surprising, but never-to-be-realized wish.

"I'm old now. I feel powerless. But if I were younger... I'd like to be a gypsy. It's like those who, in protest of the unjust system they live in, leave their homelands and migrate to every corner of the world, dreaming of a freedom that will never come true...